

Somewhere between two distant constellations, *Star Trek* took a sharp right-hand turn, geared up to warp factor eight and shot off with a whole new set of strange worlds to explore, audiences to seek out and profits to make.

The USS Enterprise had been creaking and groaning under the weight of the dreaded space disease holyheck geriatricus, which always has proved fatal, when Doctor McCoy prescribed a life-saving dose of regenerative script-writing.

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# HOW I GOT TREKKED

Ian Horner talks to Wil Wheaton about life on the Starship Enterprise in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

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The result is *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, now airing with great success in the US and released on video in Australia by CIC-Taft.

To drive home a point, with William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy each pushing 57, the new crew of the Starship Enterprise includes a bright and very likeable lad of 16, Wil Wheaton, the star of the hit movie *Stand By Me*. He spoke to Ian Horner about life aboard the new Enterprise and discussed why the new show, like its predecessor, already is making history.

"Yeah, we were picked up for another season before any network or syndication saw the show. I don't know why - but we were real thrilled," he said by phone from his Los Angeles home.

"Paramount seems real pleased with the money we're bringing in, the audience we're getting and the quality of the show. We're really pulling in viewers and ratings."

And all this in the face of the major networks who each knocked it back, handing it on a platter to the the 210 syndicated stations, who are still laughing.

The whole phenomenon is now 22 years old - seven years older than Wil himself, who nevertheless offered quite a perceptive reason for Gene Roddenberry's extraordinary success.

"I think Gene's saying we have the threat of nuclear war and AIDS and everything hanging

over us but we're gonna cut through this crap and get into the future and this is what it's going to be like.

"Nowadays we're all asking if there's going to be a future but back in 1949 at least George Orwell was writing 1984. Now I don't see anybody writing 2084. But Gene's doing that. I admire him very much."

Like all of us, Wil got hooked on *Star Trek* re-runs. "I'm not a Trekkie by definition but I watched the old show and I have my share of collectors' items. I have the *Star Fleet Technical Manual*, a bunch of Enterprise books, a whole bunch of role-playing guides and almost all the novels.

"When it comes to the new show no-one tried to improve anything. It's an entirely different situation except there are still Klingons and Romulans but the starship's designs are essentially the same and the Federation is still around. The characters are completely new, the relationships are entirely different and there are a lot more story possibilities now with the technology we have.

"We've taken a lot of criticism from Trekkies saying we copied the original series, which is kind of unwarranted but what can you do?"

He's met several of the original players and, apparently, they're all very pleased with it. They said it was great and commented on how much things have changed.

There wasn't much else they could say, seeing they all have a vested interest in the cult which still produces movies with the original cast.

The most formidable thing about Wil's character, Wes Crusher, is the jargon dialogue.

At least he doesn't have to wear pointy ears. "No! When I did the test I knew I was playing a human so I wasn't too worried about weird make-up but there are a lot of other challenges. It's not like you're playing a show that's in the past where you can draw on history. It's taking place in the future so I'm creating a history for my character.

"Wes is a real bright, real witty kid - wise beyond his years. And he's a real genius type. In some preliminary episodes there was a lot of 'Wesley the wiz kid' coming out but that's changed. Now it's more like 'Wesley the real person who just happens to have an IQ of 600'.

Just like me. Only my IQ is 650.

"I have to fight my way through quite a bit of technobabble - you'd think those lines would be easiest to learn because it's all written out for you but, man, some of that technical dialogue is so hard, it's so complicated. It's stuff you never heard of because, essentially it doesn't exist.

"My friends ask me a lot of *Star Trek*-type questions and I'm just expected to know the answers. Like, what exactly does dilithium do? and, are there toilets on the Enterprise? stuff like that. I just have to make up answers and give them a lot of white noise."

What about faulty special effects?



